



The Great Encouragement

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LEIGH · MITCHELL · HODGES



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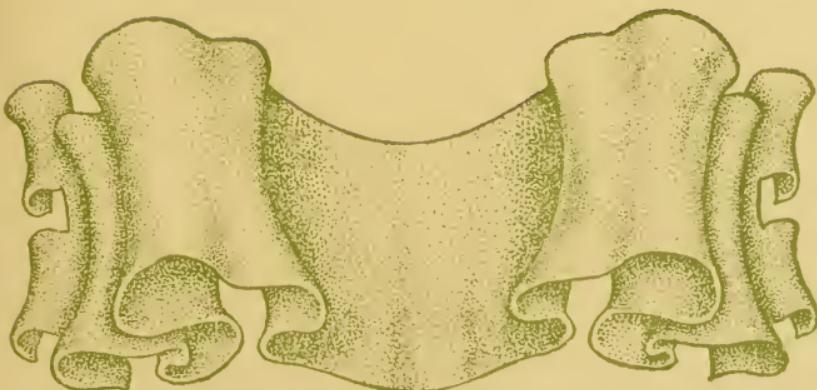
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The Great Encouragement

by

Leigh Mitchell Hodges





The Great Encouragement

And Other Helpful Essays

By

Leigh Mitchell Hodges

(The Optimist) ¹¹

author of

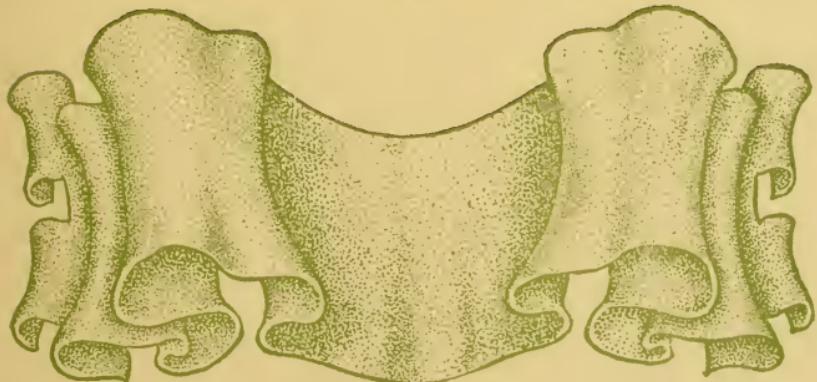
The Great Optimist

The Worth of Service

The Life Worth While



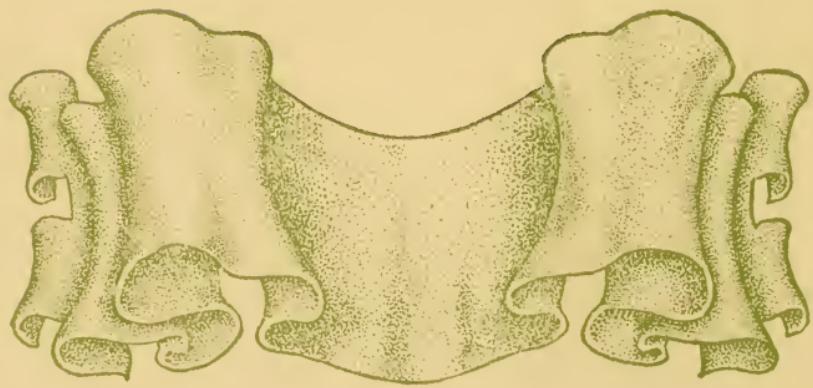
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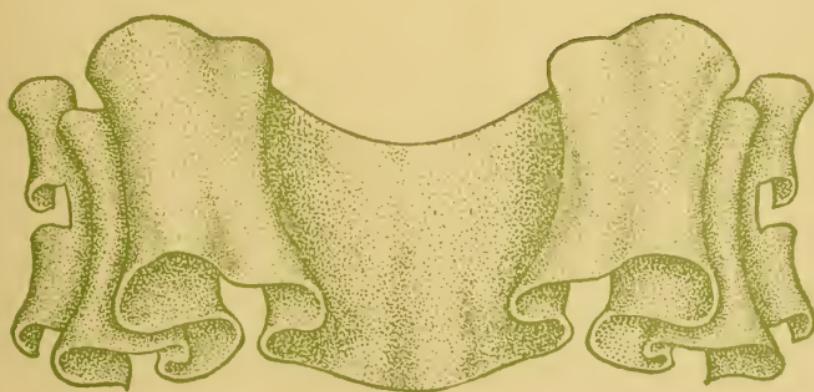
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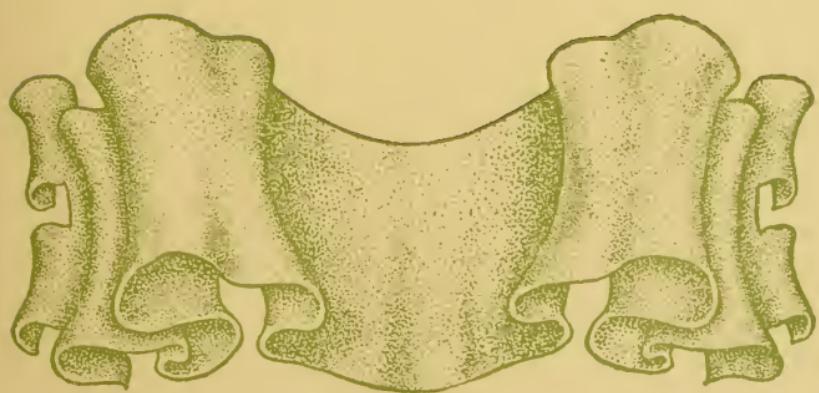
To A. C. W., whose
perfect friendship has
been to me a great
encouragement • •





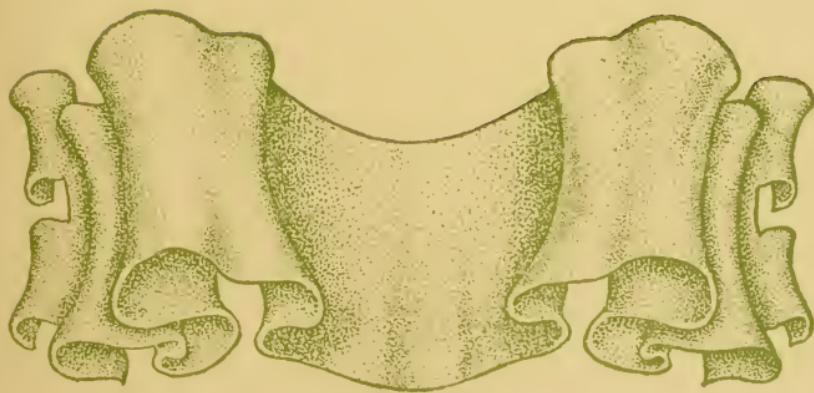
Contents

- I. The Great Encouragement
- II. Gold-Seeking
- III. An Ideal
- IV. The Voice
- V. Abraham Lincoln's Failure
- VI. The Kingdom of Play
- VII. Inasmuch
- VIII. The Storms of Life
- IX. The Art of Work
- X. A Dream





Yesterday's conquer-
ings are keys which
will unlock the doors
to to-day's victories.



The Great Encouragement

MY friend, this is the great encouragement—that it has happened often before to many another.

And has been conquered!

It does not matter what your burden may be. Fate may seem to have singled you out. You may think none ever had to suffer as you are suffering; to bear what you must bear.

But you are not alone.

Over this same rough stretch of the Road multitudes have dragged through the dust of despair. Through all the years men and women—even little children—have kept climbing these same steeps.

They are near you now, though you may not know.

Stretch out your hand or give one call, and you will find you are not alone. Speak with some of these, and you may learn yours is not the hardest lot.

Look back across the centuries, and somewhere you will see a case like yours crowned with victory.



THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

What once has been borne and conquered
can be borne and conquered again.

Reject, if you choose, the counsel of those
who see you struggling and try to help. Still
you face the changeless fact that in years gone
many a burden like the one now taxing your
strength and courage has been carried bravely
to relief; is being so carried to-day, and per-
haps by some weaker than you.

You are not alone.

You cannot be alone when you suffer.

At once you come into companionship with
all who have lived. From the earliest dawn of
human consciousness your loss, your grief,
your heart-ache has been part of the common
lot.

And through all the ages it has been fought
—and conquered!

You, too, can conquer.

Whatever your fight, you can conquer.

Yours may not be a showy victory like
Wellington's at Waterloo. It may be such
a quiet one that none but you will know. But
that does not count.

The great fact is that you can conquer.

To do this you must have faith in your-
self as an instrument fashioned and placed by

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

the hand of the Infinite Master. You must determine and be patient.

And you must work on.

For lagging or longing there is no laurel.

You must believe victory is possible.

"That is where I fail," you say.

You believe to-morrow will come, do you not? This you base on the fact that always "to-morrow" has come—nothing more.

Always victory has come to those who willed and worked and waited.

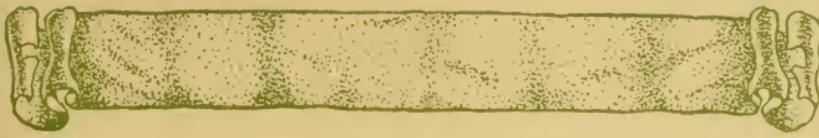
Why should it not come to you?

There is no reason why it should not. There is a Past full of reasons why it should come. And it will!

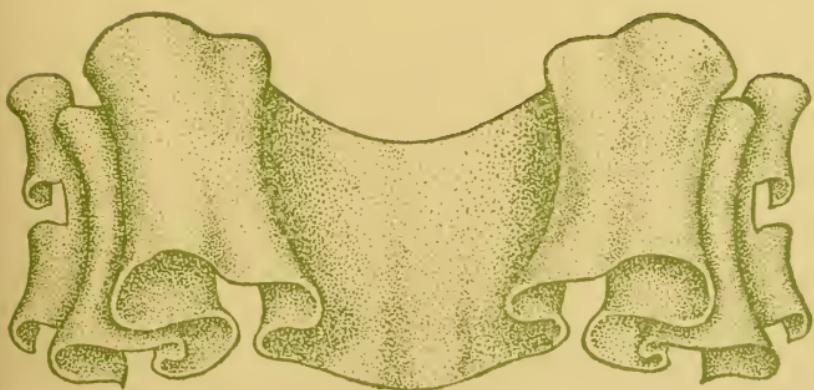
It may not be the triumph you visioned.

To men it may look like defeat.

But in your heart you will know, and God will know, and that is enough.



Life's truest riches
are those which only
hearts and souls can
hold.



Gold-Seeking

HIS little hand was soft and warm and so was her little hand, and neither of them could keep step with me as we walked along the old, old road in the early morning.

“We will hunt for gold,” I said. And they laughed and were gay as we started.

“Some one already has been here,” he shouted, seeing footprints.

“Yes, many have come this way.”

“Did all of them find gold?” he asked. I told him I did not know.

“We’ll find it,” he said cheerily. “Let’s go faster! I like gold. It is so shiny and pretty. Once I had some,—on the top of a candy box. We played with it ever so long and it never got dull at all.”

“I’m sure we’ll find it,” she said.



A butterfly coursed near—a yellow butterfly.
Its wings glistened in the sunlight.

“There is our gold,” she cried. “Let me get it.”

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

I told her it was not our gold. We were hunting a kind that would buy things and bring us pleasure and rest and all such good.

So on we walked, and came to a field thick-sprinkled with dandelions.

"There, there it is!" they chorused. "Now we can have all we want. Isn't it beautiful! And there's such a lot of it!"

"Those are wild flowers," I said. "They will not buy anything."

"Is gold only good for buying things?" she asked.

I had to say yes.



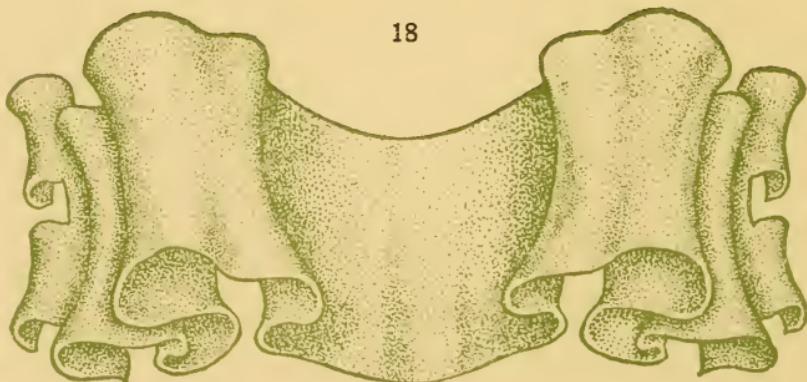
The day grew old.

Into the west dropped the sun, leaving the sky aglow with its good-night smile.

"Surely that is what we are hunting," he said. "Where could we find more gold?"

"That is not it, my boy. The gold we are hunting is dug out of the ground or sifted from sand or passed from one to another. That is only mock-gold. It will not buy things. We must go on."

Into the night we went. It was dark, at first, and chilly. They held tighter to me and said they were tired and wanted to sleep.



THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

Then he caught sight of the stars and he knew they were our gold.

But I knew better—or thought I did.



Their hands were thin and knotted, and I was not with them. They had come a long way down the old road and had left me far behind, asleep.

“Do you remember that butterfly we saw when we started?” he asked.

She bent forward and asked him to say it again, for she was deaf.

“Yes, yes,” she answered in a thin voice. “I remember. And he said it was not the gold we were hunting, didn’t he?”

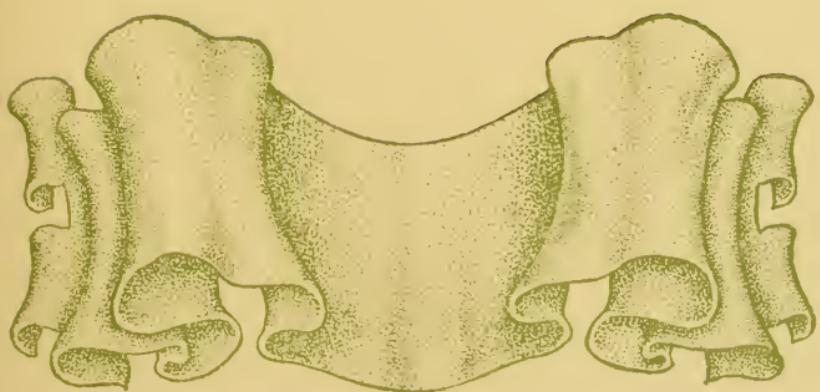
“That is what he said. And it was the same with the dandelions and the sunset and the stars. But I think he was mistaken.”

“I know he was,” she said. “He told us they would not buy things, but just the remembrance of them has bought more for me than all the gold I ever had.”

“And for me, too,” he said.



It will be a good day
for this world when
men learn that “Char-
acter” spells “Success.”





An Ideal

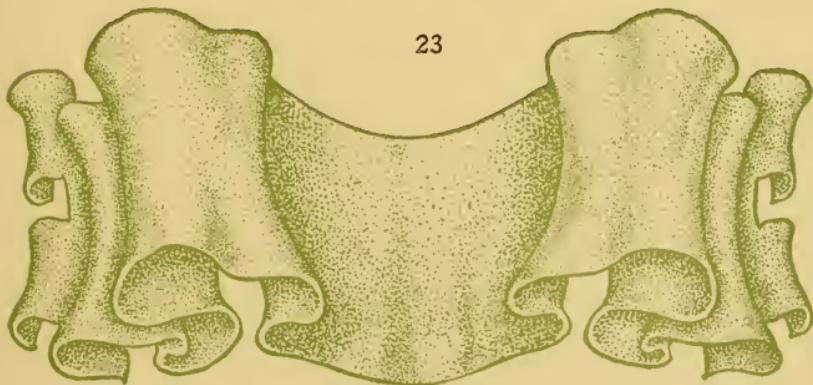
HOW wonderful it would be to meet a bright, strong, capable young man who would say, "I don't want to be a success in the way men commonly use that word!"

"I don't want to be popular because of my capacity for conviviality or my readiness to spend money freely.

"I don't want to make much money, because I have noticed that when a man goes in to make money, the money he makes often unmakes him.

"I don't want to be well known for what I own, or prominent because of my bank account. It will not matter to me whether waiters and porters know who I am, but it will matter to me whether the children in my street smile and are friendly when I come along.

"I don't want to become so steeped in matters of so-called 'business' as to have no time to walk along country roads and through wooded stretches; to learn the bird-calls com-





THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

mon to my part of the country; to sense the thrill of a June sunrise or the pathos of a sunset in winter.

“I don’t want to be a success in the sight of men and a failure within the walls of my own home.

“Perhaps I am foolish or behind the times, but I want to be able to give my best to those I love best, and to those for whose progress my best will mean most.

“I want to measure my life by duties done rather than by dollars won.

“I want to merit the friendliness of all honest working people with whom my work brings me in contact, and I want to be so genuine in speech and action that none of these will fail to accept me as an equal. I believe it is better to have the good will of an honest cart driver than the showy ‘friendship’ of a crafty bank president.

“I want to train and work with men and women who believe in work as the finest thing in the world, and who respect any form of labor that is helpful.

“I want to be useful to some one, for that will keep me from utter failure.

“For a ‘brilliant’ career I have no desire.

“I have noticed that most ‘brilliant’ careers

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

are meteor-like—and all a meteor does is to make men gasp.

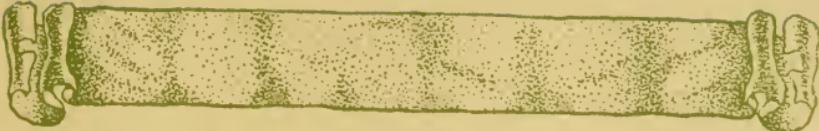
“I want to do what I can to keep men calm and courageous, and I have an idea that the way to begin is to school myself to be calm and courageous.

“I am not so much interested in the family from which I came as in the family of which I am the possible head. The good or bad behind me is no affair of mine, but for the good or bad in front of me I am in some measure directly responsible.

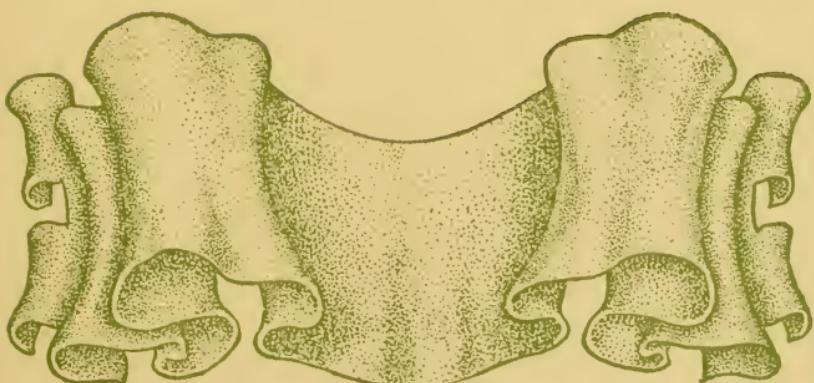
“If I can help to make this world a more comfortable and kindly place for children and mothers and ‘all who are desolate and oppressed’; if I can help to put fairer laws into practice and coax more humanity out of men’s hearts; if I can live a clean life and be a good husband and a just father, I shall feel I have succeeded.”

How wonderful it would be to hear something like this!

Yet many young men are attempting tasks more difficult.



The soul speaks
softly, but its coun-
sel is the echo of God's
voice.



The Voice

HAS the Voice ever whispered to you? The Voice that speaks sometimes through the upturned face of a child; sometimes through a strain of beautiful music; again from the far, still stars on a clear night?

The Voice that sounds now above the noise of the city streets; now in the soft musing of the meadow stream?

Loudest and clearest, however, in the darkness of your own room, when your little part of the world is asleep; when you almost can hear the beating of your own heart; when you seem to stand face to face with what might be your soul.

Has the Voice, at such times, ever whispered to you?

Whispered of the things that are real; the things worth your time and skill and strength?

Whispered imperiously of the things that really make life—not those externals which glow a moment in the sunshine of shallow thinking—but the vital verities of an existence that is more than material?



THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

Has the Voice ever caused you to doubt your own wisdom in elevating this or that to high place; in taking serious notice of this or that; in being swayed, guided or led by this or that?

Saying to you, as if bearing a message from your own far-away self, "Can you not see! Can you not understand?"

Have you ever closed your soul to the Voice?

Have you ever said—in thought—to the Voice, "All you say is beautiful to hear, but can I keep alive on beautiful sayings? Am I not living in a world where matter-of-fact conditions must be faced day after day; where to gain certain results, certain methods must be used; where one is forced to deal with men and things as needs demand or custom dictates?"

"Is anything more real and necessary than the need for providing food, and something to wear and a roof and walls for shelter? Shall I follow a whispering through a world of stern realities, or chase a butterfly on the heights, while those on the lower road are calling for bread and meat?"

"Shall I let you lead me to ecstatic starvation?"

If you will let the Voice answer these ques-

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

tions—which you are not apt to do—you will be told that these things at which you scoff as unreal are the most real.

As real as love, which you cannot see or touch or measure into lengths or pounds.

Yet what is so powerful as love?



Yes, the Voice has whispered to you.

It whispers often to each of us. But, because it cannot be eaten or spent or put on the mantel, it is passed by as a silly will-o'-the-wisp sort of thing, an illusion.

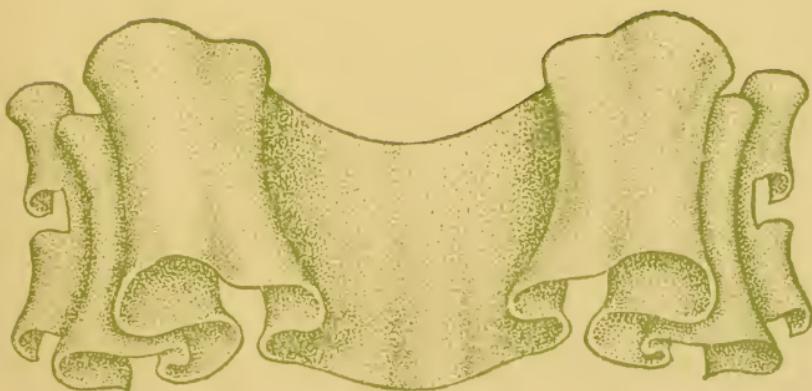
And because it is not listened to or heeded, we go stumbling—falling more often than we should; bending double where we might stand erect; seeking in vain for the lights of life among the ruins of the material things in which we placed our trust.

That Voice which speaks to us sometimes through the upturned face of a child; sometimes through beautiful music; sometimes through the stars.

Or in the darkness and silence of what we often miscall “loneliness!”



Often failure is but
the withering of the
blossom to make room
for the fruit.



Abraham Lincoln's Failure

HERE are a few words for all who are dis-couraged—especially you young men and women around thirty-three who sometimes feel as if your grip on possible success isn't as strong as it might be or as you think it should be:

I do not think I can come to Kentucky this season. I am so poor and make so little headway in the world, that I drop back in a month of idleness as much as I gain in a year's sowing.

This is the exact wording of the last paragraph in a letter written to a certain Joshua F. Speed on the Fourth of July, 1842.

That letter was dated at Springfield, Illinois, and the signature at the bottom of the page was "A. Lincoln."

Yes, the same Lincoln who now ranks with the immortals as one of the few really great men who have lived.

He was then well into his thirty-fourth year. Since earliest boyhood he had been struggling



THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

against poverty and what is called "bad luck." The helpful friendship of Speed was about the only thing worth having that had come his way.

In the summer of 1841 he suffered an attack of melancholia, which was largely dispelled by a visit to Speed's Kentucky home. Now his friend wanted him to come again, but he could not accept the invitation.

With more than half his life behind him, Abraham Lincoln was "so poor" and had made "so little headway in the world" that he had neither heart nor money for this inexpensive trip!

Does this mean anything to you—you who may have reached a like place?

Doesn't it help you to know—by his own simple confession—that Lincoln faced failure at thirty-four?

Had he more than you have now, or quite so much, in some ways?

Had any person as much in 1842 as any one has to-day?

Think of the countless advantages added to human chances since the writing of that letter!

Discouraged, and doubtful of his own powers, he saw nothing behind and little ahead.

But he plodded on, patiently.

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

He kept working.

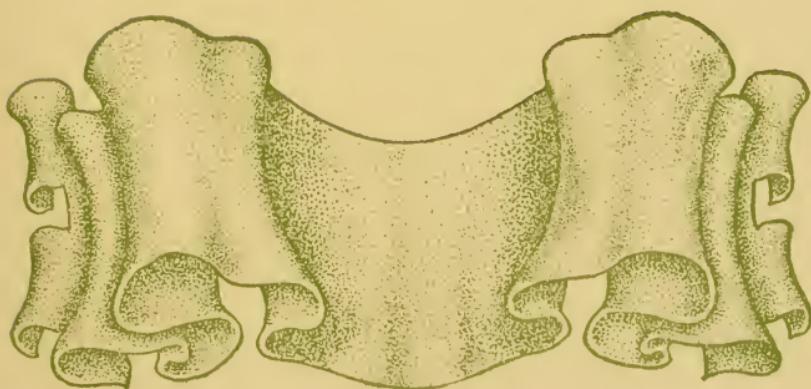
He did the best he could.

And this page from the book of his life is passed along to you simply because, when I came upon it late the other night, the silence of the stars seemed grandly broken by a voice, saying:

“Yes, I can understand. I have known what it is to be discouraged by lack of results. But, my friend, work on and you can win.”



Take time for play
and life will give
you more time for your
work.



The Kingdom of Play

BACK yonder across the years, where the hills were pure gold in the sunlight of Childhood; where flowers were high treasures and we feasted on fun—why shouldn't we wander through the fields of Memory on this and many another morning to that place where Play was king!

Why should our excursions into the past so often lead us to tearful and troubrous times?

Why, my friend?

For in your book of years, as in all such books, are pages of light all printed in love and laughter, and the stories they tell are the sort that never grow old.

They are about the Kingdom of Play, where once upon a time all of us were willing subjects of Joy.

In this world we are subjects of two kingdoms—the Kingdom of Play and the Kingdom of Work. On beyond, in some world of which we know nothing, perhaps we shall come to a kingdom where Work and Play have found their proper balance.

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

We know this balance has not yet been found here.

This we know because we are not so happy as we would like to be, or as we could be if we better understood the relation of these two necessities.

And while few seem to understand that Work is an open door to contentment, fewer still seem to sense the place of Play as a bridge to health of body and mind.

As if blind, we stand unheeded of the great lesson daily lived before our very eyes by the children.

Proud with a foolish pride, we laugh a little and go on about our "business."

Just as if it were not high part of the busyness of life to play a little every day!

Perhaps we might think and act differently did we step more frequently into the magic coach of Memory to be whirled back over the hills and through the valleys into the meadows of the morning.

Of all journeys we can make, none is so fine or so full of profit as this.

It brings us once more in touch with things that were good and true to us when, as children, we found a wealth of pleasure in "those

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

cheap delights which please the wise"—for children are wise.

We need to revive the hopes and laughter of that morning-time, when all hurts could be kissed away, and sleep fell upon us like gentle rain on the flowers; when troubles passed like summer clouds and joys echoed through all the days—some of them even to this far day!

We need the faith and frankness of childhood, even more now than when we gave them the best rooms in our lives.

Are they gone?

No, they are not gone.

Just around the corner they are waiting to be called back.

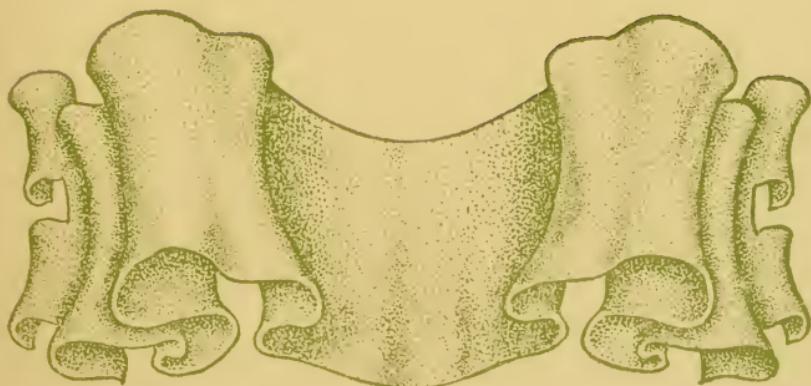
Just outside the closed doors of our hearts they stand patiently, waiting for us to let them in and make them welcome, as in the long ago.

Perhaps they cannot understand why we have kept them there so long. Perhaps if they could speak, it would not be so.

They do speak. If we listen, we can hear them, calling to us cheerily across the years—calling us back to the Kingdom of Play.



Our kingliest visitors
sometimes come in
lowliest beggar's garb.



Inasmuch

ONE of Tolstoy's most beautiful stories is of a poor old Russian peasant who, thinking the Christ soon would come back to earth, began to look for Him daily.

Among those who passed his hut, he searched in vain for the figure he longed to see. Hour after hour he spent at the little light-hole, hoping to have his great desire satisfied.

He knew he would know his Friend, for that Friend would wear white garments and a halo would shine round His head.

So through the summer he waited patiently.

Winter came, harsh and cruel. In the village streets and the fields snow lay deep and sharp winds swept along like swirling legions of icy spears.

The old man had to stuff the light-hole, so no longer could he look out. All day he would sit in his room, trying to catch the muffled sounds of passing feet and shuddering as he saw his scanty store of food grow smaller—wondering why the Christ was so long in coming.



THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

At last came a knock at his door one evening.

Quickly he opened it, but not to the expected visitor. Only a wretched traveler, ragged and chilled. But he was made welcome and given the seat nearest the fire, and with him the peasant shared the last of his food.

That was a great sacrifice, for now if his Friend came, he would have nothing to give Him. So he did not try to talk, but sighed himself to sleep.

Suddenly for him the dark room was filled with a light bright as that of cloudless noon, and the Christ was by his side, saying, "I am the outcast you have sheltered and fed."

When the old man awoke, the stranger was gone.

Even so, by the little fires of our hoping hearts we sit awaiting heavenly visitors, not knowing that when they do come it will be as those with whom we have worked and dealt all these days.

We work and wait for great things—the shining garments and the halo—because we seek happiness and we think such a state must perforce dwell in grander form than that befitting lesser persons and events.

All the while the common things which have

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

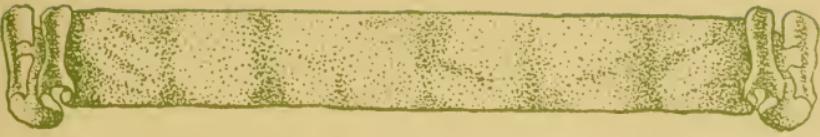
been ours from the very first are holding for us what we crave!

All the time is hid behind the ragged front of our misfortunes and disappointments much of beauty and blessing, if only we will use them as friendly guides.

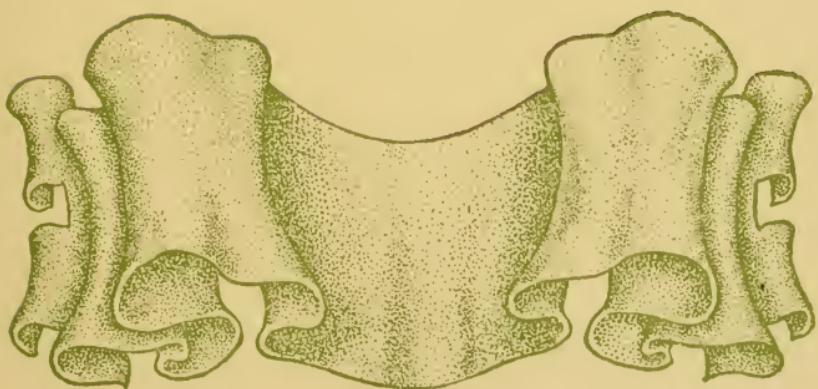
Yet we wait for the burst of splendor, the sound of the trumpet, not knowing that these are for the few and that even then they are not so much as we think them to be.

After all, the still small voice of the everyday thing is the finest of music, and the comfort to be had from common guests is the truest comfort.

The common guests who knock as beggars, yet leave our rooms filled with light, and us wondering why we should have complained!



In life, as in Nature,
clouds and rain
mother sunshine and
flowers.



The Storms of Life

YOU know how it is sometimes when you walk in the country on an afternoon early in September—how your eyes feast on the grass that carpets the rolling, tree-set meadows; how the far, low hills quiver in the warm haze; how all things seem ripe for the harvest!

Then quickly a cloud grows out of the smooth sky. Soon it has curtained the sun and brought on darkness. The air is awesome with that strange stillness which creeps before the storm.

A gust of wind, and another. A splash of rain. A flash, a growl, and the torrents!

Suddenly it is over and the world is brighter than before, in the full glow of the returning sun. Dust is laid and every blade and leaf washed clean. The field is thick-set with sparkling jewels—"fresh water pearls" Rostand calls them.

Your fear of the storm is lost now in joy at the beauty it left behind.



THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

So sweep the storms of life across our little fields of being.

And how often we make ourselves miserable as they approach, or even before they begin to gather—for many times we cower at the feet of Fear when comes no storm at all!

Much we lose in counting loss before it comes—and most of it never comes!

But the storms that do come—the lowering days, the misty mornings and humid hours that mark and mar life's calendar—what of them?

My friend, think a moment.

If to Nature the circling years of days and nights brought only clear skies, how long would fields keep green and streams run flush? How long would the soil continue to nourish and support mankind?

If clouds never shut out the sun in summer; if winds never waved the branches of trees and the slim banners of grass; if no rain fell and no refreshment came through fogs—where would we be at the end of a few months?

We must take and use the weather of life as Nature takes and uses the changes that come to her. Never a rose delayed its opening because of a coming storm; never an apple withered rather than risk the wind.

There is no fear in Nature, though every-

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

where she makes fine show of caution. And when her plans are upset by weather, she does not grieve or languish, but begins at once to rebuild.

So must we take the weather of life.

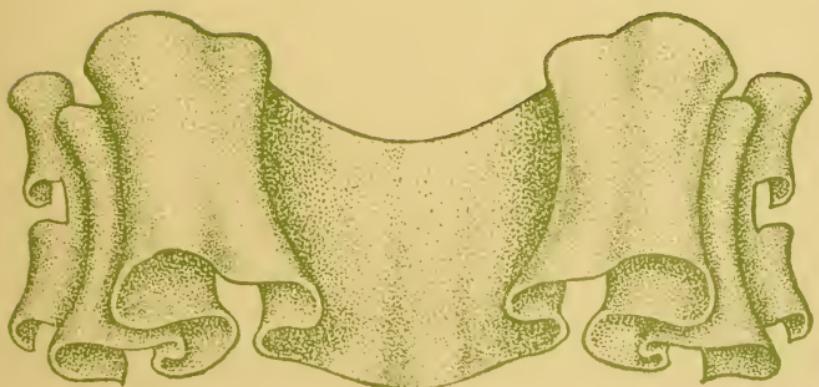
Not yet are we wise enough to know how to eliminate grief and worry, and despair is ever kept within call.

But in your heart—hidden behind many a fear, perhaps!—is a courage which, if loosed, will set at naught all storms that come, and keep you from losing what is lost through fear for those which never come.

It is the courage Nature shows in the Spring, when she feeds on the fallen leaves Winter snatched from her last Autumn, and thus gains strength for the Summer of her highest joy—and ours.



Here is the best recipe for a good life:
"Do your work as well
as you can and be kind."



The Art of Work

ONCE I talked about genius with a really great painter—a man whose work has won place and praise throughout the world, and said to him:

“The more I see of men and their output, the more I feel that genius is energy efficiently applied.”

“You are right,” he said. “I say you are right because I am thinking of my own experience. I have some measure of what is called ‘native ability,’ and by making fair use of my time in the practice and cultivation of my gift, I have managed to turn out some good work.

“I know now, however, that if I had made full use of my time, I would to-day be a better painter, and my acquaintance with men and women in the field of art bears me out in my belief that the ‘secret’ of success in art, as in everything else, is hard work.

“There’s John Sargent. Not long ago some one said to him, ‘How fine it would be if more



THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

men were possessed of such rare ability as you have!"

"How fine it would be if more men were possessed of a determination to work," flashed Sargent. "To-day in America are a hundred young painters who could do as good work as I ever did if they would apply themselves industriously and devote themselves enthusiastically to their art."

Which turned my thoughts back to that sentence of Hugh Black's—"No great work of art is possible without previous training in the art of work."

Yet few of those who have to work—and every man and woman HAS to work, though some do not know it—ever think of the art of work.

Coursing down the centuries has come the story of how the first man brought upon himself the "curse of labor"; how he was "condemned" to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. Few stop to think how this "curse" was born of the "blessing" of idleness!

When we view it in this, its true light, the picture changes.

We see idleness as the severest penalty that can be visited upon man, and work as the highest blessing.

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

Nor do we need the aid of allegory in this great visioning.

We know work is the source of more happiness and helpfulness than any other thing within man's reach.

We know it is the cornerstone of character, which is a tower built slowly with our every-day doing, and is not the result of occasional spiritual insight or mental exaltation.

We know it is the mother of contentment, and that those who are most contented are those who have work to do and do it well.

Our first ideal of God is as a worker—creating the universe.

Our first knowledge of Jesus is of a worker—helping Joseph in the carpenter shop.

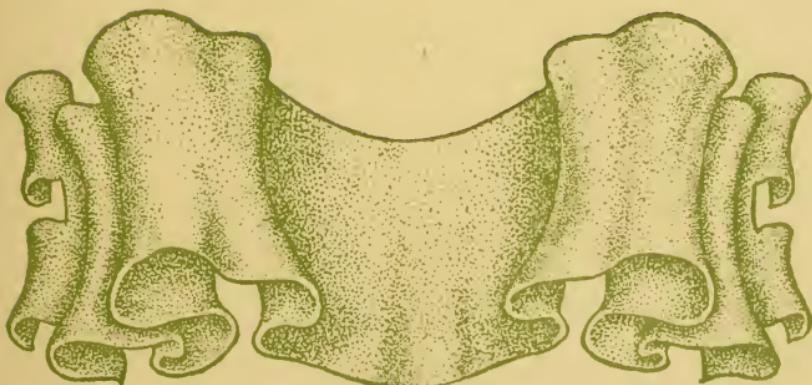
Our choicest personal memories are clustered about the first honest work we did when young.

Life's first command is to work.

Man's first endeavor should be to find work fitted to his strength and temperament—then to put into that work all possible energy and enthusiasm, so as to do it as well as he can.



The prime problem
which faces each of
us is how to make the
best of the Here and
Now.



A Dream

I DREAMED the other night of a city.

In that city the first thought was for the health of the people.

All water given them to drink was clear and pure. The streets were swept at night, so disease-laden dust would not fly in the faces of the people. The back streets were swept and sprinkled like the main ones, and all the alley-ways were clean.

It was a beautiful city, not only because of trees and drives and well-kept houses, but because within its bounds one had a feeling it was healthful—that it was making for ruddy-cheeked children who would grow to be full-bodied and strong men and women.

And for happiness, because happiness follows health.

In my dream I saw a creature walking through the streets of that city, crying out in a loud voice, "I am a lost soul! I am a lost soul!"

A strong man on his way to work stopped to ask this creature what he meant.



THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

"I am a lost soul," he wailed. "I have done a wrong and I do not know where I shall go after I die!"

"That is true enough, my friend," said the worker, "but it is of far greater importance that you should know how to go while you live. We of this city are not yet able to dissect souls to find whether they are lost or saved, but we know, from years of experience, that a saved body means peace and profit, and these things are needed in this world, whatever may be needed in the next. Come with me, my friend, and I will show you where to find some of the things you seem to have lost."

So the worker took him to a church—I know it was a church, for it had a steeple. But within it was unlike any church I ever saw, for in place of pews were carpenters' benches and many different sorts of machinery. And men of all ages were working at these and making useful things, some of which also were beautiful.

Down in the basement, which must once have been a Sunday-school room, were women and young girls. They sat there sewing, darning and mending, and they laughed and talked as they worked. Flowers were around them

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

and through the clean window glass the sun shined bright and warm.

One of the men seemed to be a sort of foreman, so I spoke to him, and he said he was the minister of that church. He wore blue overalls and his hands were black and oily from the machine he had been tending.

"You do not look like a preacher," I said.

"That is because I am not a preacher," he answered. "There is no preacher here. We are WORKING out our salvation, and the minister is chosen from among the best workmen. If he can talk well, he talks—sometimes. But we know that the best way to save the cargo is first to keep the ship from sinking. And we look upon the body as a ship which is carrying a soul through this existence to some higher existence."

While we were talking, a man came in and looked all around and walked away without saying a word. I asked who that man was, and was told he was the mayor of the city.

"It is his duty to see that the men and women are happy in their work," said the minister, "for unless they are, the city cannot be a good place in which to live."

I asked where all these ideas had grown and who first had planted them in the minds and

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

hearts of the people, and as he turned to answer, I awoke.

I do not know the name of that city!

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